

Vallejo and at Martinez. Once the McClellan Hospital is completed, VA expects capacity for 55 inpatient beds and 110,000 outpatient visits per year, and the projected workload for the outpatient clinics will exceed 140,000 outpatient visits per year.

#### CONCLUSION

Mr. President, in closing, I acknowledge the work of my colleagues in the House—Chairman BOB STUMP and ranking Minority Member LANE EVANS—and our Committee's Chairman, Senator SPECTER, in developing this comprehensive legislation.

Mr. President, I thank the staff who have worked extremely long and hard on this compromise—Mike Durishin, Jill Cochran, Mary Ellen McCarthy, Adam Sachs, Susan Edgerton, Carl Commenator, Pat Ryan, Mike Brinck, Ralph Ibson, Kingston Smith, Sloan Rappoport, and others on the House Committee, and Jim Gottlieb, Kim Lipsky, Mary Schoelen, Charlie Battaglia, Bill Tuerk, and John Bradley, with the Senate Committee. I also thank Bob Cover and Charlie Armstrong of the House and Senate Offices of Legislative Counsel for their excellent assistance and support in drafting this compromise agreement.

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the Department of Veterans Affairs Employment Discrimination Resolution and Adjudication Act. As we approach Veterans Day, it is indeed fitting that this important legislation will soon become an integral part of title 38, of the United States Code.

This legislation addresses the critical issue of sexual harassment within the Department of Veterans Affairs and ensures that the rights of all employees will be protected. I would like to recognize the leadership of Chairman SPECTER and the support of Senators ROCKEFELLER and GRAHAM in the development of this necessary legislative remedy.

Specifically, this bill creates within the Department an Office of Employment Discrimination Complaints Resolution which will be headed by a director who shall be solely responsible for resolving complaints of unlawful employment discrimination within the Department. It requires that those employed in handling the complaints be properly trained and that complaints are handled in a fair and objective manner. The legislation further ensures that those individuals in top management positions are held to the same standards concerning equal opportunity employment law as those individuals that they manage and supervise.

The legislation requires that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submit to Congress three reports on the implementation and operation of the equal opportunity employment system. These reports are due April 1, 1998, January 1, 1999, and January 1, 2000. In ad-

dition to the reports required of the Department, the legislation further stipulates that an assessment of the Employment Discrimination Complaint Resolution system be conducted by an independent contractor who has been approved by both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. The first independent assessment is due June 1, 1998 with the second report due June 1, 1999.

Mr. President, our Nation's veterans and the over 200,000 Federal workers who support the nationwide network of the Department of Veterans Affairs programs and services must be assured that they can put veterans first in an environment that has zero tolerance for any type of sexual, emotional, or physical harassment.

Mr. FAIRCLOTH. Mr. President, I rise in support of the Department of Veterans Affairs Employment Discrimination Act. This legislation offers an effective and expeditious method for filing and processing sexual harassment and employment discrimination claims within the Department.

Over a year ago, the problem of sexual harassment with Veterans Affairs Department was brought to my attention by a case of widespread abuse at the VA Medical Center in Fayetteville, NC. Regrettably, this situation involved the director of the facility who was also the man responsible for handling complaints filed against him. Not surprisingly, claims of sexual harassment made against the director went nowhere, and he continued his reprehensible behavior without fear of being caught.

The legislation I introduced with my colleague from Florida, Senator GRAHAM, and my colleague from Arkansas, Senator HUTCHINSON, is a constructive measure that would prevent such a blatant abuse of authority from occurring again. This bill will create the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication [OEDCA] with a director who would report only to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of VA. Centralizing authority within the OEDCA will restore a large amount of accountability to currently flawed system.

Mr. President, it is imperative that Congress provide the thousands of employees of the Veterans Affairs Department with a system they can rely upon to judiciously resolve employment discrimination claims. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation to prevent an incident such as the one that occurred in my State from happening again.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I move that the Senate concur in the amendments of the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

#### WAIVING TIME LIMITATIONS IN REGARD TO MEDAL OF HONOR AWARD

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 2813 now at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2813) to waive time limitations specified by law in order to allow the Medal of Honor to be awarded to Robert R. Ingram of Jacksonville, Florida, for acts of valor while a Navy Hospital Corpsman in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read three times and passed; that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; and that any statements relating thereto be placed at the appropriate place in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2813) was read the third time and passed.

#### CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE ACT OF 1997

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 276, H.R. 2366.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2366) to transfer to the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to conduct the census of agriculture, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; and that any statements relating to the bill appear at the appropriate place in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2366) was read the third time and passed.

#### ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS CONSERVATION ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1997

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 285, H.R. 1658.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1658) to reauthorize and amend the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and related laws.